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LIFE AMONG THE INSANE.

THE subjoined article is published as an illustration of the inadequacy of our laws to guard the liberty of citizens suspected of insanity. As the author explains, she was imprisoned nearly thirty years in an asylum, and then discharged with the unanimous declaration of an official board of examining physicians that she was not insane, and had never been insane.

EDITOR.

I do not think any woman in America is better qualified than I to supply the material for a good sermon on insane asylums—for I was locked up in one for twenty-eight years.

During those years I never lost my reason—it is a wonder I did not—and so what I say may be relied upon as being truthful. The authority for my statement that I am not insane is the Committee* on Lunacy of the Board of Public Charities of Pennsylvania, through whose influence, in the summer of 1885, my unjust imprisonment came to an end.

My story is simple. I was put in the asylum for two reasons : the first was that I was extravagant and too fond of dress. What a lot of asylums there would be if all people whose natures were like mine had to be locked up ! The other reason was that my family wanted me relieved of the disgrace of being publicly accused of obtaining goods under false representations, by resorting to the insanity defense, which, nowadays, seems reserved for the use of defendants in murder or arson cases.

But to begin. I was born in 1825, and am, therefore, now sixty years old. My father was William Draper Brincklé, a physician, who lived in Girard Row, Philadelphia. My mother died while I was young.

On July 13th, 1857, I was placed in the State Hospital for the Insane at Harrisburg, Penn., on the commitment of two physicians,

* This committee consists of Philip C. Garrett, Philadelphia, Chairman ; Henry M. Hoyt, Philadelphia ; Thomas G. Morton, M.D., Philadelphia ; E. Coppee Mitchell, Philadelphia ; W. W. H. Davis, Doylestown ; A. J. Ourt, M.D., Philadelphia, Secretary.

one my father, the other a stranger to me. An excuse, perhaps, for the difficulty in which I became involved was that I had no own mother to guide me. My father, occupied with his professional duties, was of course much away from home, so that I grew up, wandering at my own pleasure. Yet my education was by no means neglected; for I received a thorough training in the ordinary English branches, became quite familiar with the French language, and acquired a thorough knowledge of music.

I was naturally of a gay temperament and inclined to extravagance, and I knew that I had my father, and an uncle who resided in our family, to help me out of possible financial straits. My father's property was invested in the mercantile business of the uncle to whom I have referred. In the year in which I was placed in the asylum there was a general panic in mercantile circles, and my father and uncle were unable to pay my debts.

The particular difficulty in which I became involved was that of buying furniture on part credit, for a parlor which I had rented in the home of two old ladies, distant relatives of my father's family. Their house was small and I had no room for a piano. Having been musically educated it was a great deprivation to me to have no piano; I therefore moved to a larger house in the same neighborhood, securing furnished parlors. Having no use for the furniture which I had purchased for the smaller house, I sold it. This proceeding came to the knowledge of the dealer from whom it had been purchased, and he prosecuted me. Before the time came for my appearance in court I was placed in the asylum. My father was advised to take this course by the late Judge George W. Woodward, then of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. The examination of both physicians was very brief. My father asked me a few simple questions and then took his departure. The late Dr. George McClellan, the other examiner, inquired how I was in bodily health. I complained merely of a slight headache, having no idea that the visit was made with an alleged view of determining my mental condition. He also asked me if I was able to take a journey and where I would like to go. I replied that I was quite able and willing, and would like to go to Long Branch, remembering that my health generally had been much improved on a former occasion at that place. My father subsequently informed me of the purpose of the examination and of the determination to send me to an asylum, explaining to me that he did not think I

was insane, but that it was all that could be done under the circumstances.

I remember very distinctly that on the way to Harrisburg I did not relish the idea of being classed with lunatics, but Judge Woodward, who accompanied me, represented that it was better than being imprisoned in a jail, and that insanity was after all the bluntest horn of the dilemma, because it preserved family honor. So, on that eventful day, I was led into the presence of Dr. John Curwen, at that time the superintendent of the institution (now in charge of the State Hospital at Warren, Pa.), and Mrs. Cole, its matron. To these people Judge Woodward, in my presence, spoke of my extravagant tendencies; what he said when my back was turned I do not know. He wished me good-bye rather sorrowfully, and I think when he left it was with a little remorse at what he had done.

Everything in the institution was strange to me. I felt that I, as sane a person as any of the attendants, or any one else for that matter, was in the asylum under false pretenses. I make the hint of the distinction between the state of mind of the nurses of the insane, and the state of mind of members of the general community, because my observation convinced me that the nurses at the Harrisburg Hospital, for some reason or other, were not all rational beings. Perhaps it was the contact with mad women. Perhaps the fact that some were promoted to be nurses, first having been patients, made this seem to me true.

They put me in the best ward at first. I found life insupportably dull. The only things that made existence tolerable were music, which I loved passionately, and fancy work, which I liked less because of its monotony. It was a change, however, from the sameness of idling.

My nurses were Susan Spiegelmyer, and Ruth Noble. Susan had had erysipelas, and had lost most of her hair, which afterward grew in very abundantly. An incident happened in connection with Susan's hair that will show the character of the women who were my daily associates. Susan was accustomed to go into her room every night to put her abundant locks in curl papers. In going to her apartment for the purpose named she bumped up against the bed of a patient, invariably waking her up. The patient, who was nervous and irascible, complained every time, but the bumping went on in spite of it. One night

the patient calmly got of bed as the nurse passed, grabbed one of the curls and tore it out in its entirety and by the roots, leaving a bald spot the size of a dollar, quietly remarking as she did it, "Susan, I don't like the way you do your hair." Susan never bumped that bed again.

At the end of a year in the asylum, under the kindly care of these nurses, an attack of dyspepsia, from which I suffered prior to my incarceration, disappeared. I think the regular way of living and the plain food effected that cure.

In June, 1858, my father came to see me for the first time, and complimented me on my rosy cheeks and generally healthy look. That was all very well, but I wanted to get out, and I told him so. He promised me that if I would wait until the troubles caused by my debts had blown over he would have me released. Then he went away. I never saw him again, and he died four years later. He wrote to me, however, and his letters gave me the impression that my release would be a more difficult matter than I had anticipated. The man who can be said to have managed my detention was Judge Woodward, whose visits to me were frequent.

Referring to the letters written to me by my father reminds me of the matter that he wrote mostly about. Soon after my arrival at the asylum, I met at a picnic given to all the patients a young inmate of good family. He was a son of a judge of one of the upper counties of Pennsylvania, well-bred and entertaining. After meeting several times we became engaged to be married. He was not considered insane, but it seems his family thought the hospital would be a good prescription to cure a certain intemperate disposition with which he was afflicted. He was addicted to the use of wine. My father and Judge Woodward wrote to Dr. Curwen, asking him to put a stop to our meeting. Thereafter, when my affianced and I happened to be going out walking on the same day (he, frequently on parole, without an attendant), he was allowed to go out by the front door and I was smuggled out by the back. The matron had previously smiled upon our engagement, and asked us together to take tea with her. All that was now stopped. All we could do was to correspond, letters being carried to and fro through the kindness of a night watchman. I rarely caught glimpses of the young man. For seven years, however, we wrote letters to each other, and we were all along determined that

when we both should get out I should become his wife. It was the knowledge of his being near me that made me less active in my efforts to escape. We once arranged that whoever left the asylum first should aid in the efforts of the other to obtain freedom.

My friend was, at the end of the seven years of which I have spoken, removed from the asylum, I think to the Pennsylvania Hospital for the insane in Philadelphia. I do not know whether he is dead, but think that he is. At any rate, I have completely lost trace of him.

These things I remember so vividly because they were, as I said, all I had to relieve the monotony of life. A gentleman who was at one time Consul from Maracaibo, who had been very attentive to me before my incarceration, tried to see me but was not allowed to. He had two women-cousins in the institution. One was an opium eater and the other was insane on religion.

Mrs. Dr. S—— was one of the patients in my ward who gave a great deal of trouble. She was a woman who was subject to fits of great and unusual excitement, and we had to humor her. One day she arranged the hair of a little girl-inmate somewhat differently from the usual style in which we were accustomed to see it. The effect was extremely ridiculous. She asked me if I did not think it a great improvement over the old method. In an unguarded and frank moment I admitted that I did not. I saw her turn pale with rage. I did not think anything of the matter, and walked away from the dining table which we had just risen from, toward my room. Presently there was a whirring sound, and a large dish flew over my head and smashed itself on the floor in front of me. Having missed her aim, the flinger of plates rushed toward me, picking up on her way some of the broken pieces of china. I ran rapidly through the corridor. The first person I stumbled over was little Mrs. H——, an inmate, who always sat at the door of one of the wards, guarding it as she thought. We called her the "Watchwoman." She became frightened and joined me. We sped together to the end of the ward, and barricaded ourselves in a storeroom by piling trunks against the door, and in a few moments our pursuer was captured by an attendant. I saved my life on several other occasions of similar character, by fastening myself in my room as best I could. There were no inside locks on the doors.

Untrained nurses in a hospital for the insane know no more

about treating insane people than I know about prescribing for a case of fever. The secret of proper conduct toward the insane is *management*. It requires tact. The ex-laundry-woman or factory girl who becomes a nurse cannot understand such a problem as the mind, and when the patient is refractory she can only meet it with brutality. That is wrong. Those who are deprived of reason cannot understand violence, nor has it any good effect on them. They can only turn their poor puzzled eyes in apologetic rebuke to those who assault them, and wonder what it all means. I have seen a patient who had been struck look in surprise at the nurse who struck her, and ask, "Why do you do that? What have I done?" Many patients cannot be made to comprehend that what they do is not right, and violence to them is worse than useless. We may just as well thrash a cripple for limping, or vent our malice upon a blind man because he cannot see.

The only way in which patients can get on the right side of sane nurses is by doing their work for them. They are often expected to help to sweep and clean up. Of course to coerce the insane to do this is criminal. They should be regarded as human beings whose misfortunes entitle them to sympathy and pity, and not as scape-goats and laughing-stocks because of their uselessness to society.

I saw a harmless patient who was sitting listlessly on a heating register attacked and beaten because she would not work. One nurse knocked her down and then called another nurse to her assistance. Together they got a patient afflicted with homicidal mania to join them, and the three pounded the unfortunate creature until she was black and blue. Her brother and husband happened to call and see her that very night, and to them some untrue story of the cause of her bruises was given. They were not satisfied, however, and they removed her.

One of the patients in a ward adjoining mine was one morning found hanging with her head wedged between the transom and the door-frame. She was quite dead. How she had ever got in that position was a mystery. Probably one of her associates helped her up with a chair and then removed it. One of the inmates suggested to a weak-minded companion in an adjoining ward to tie a handkerchief around her (the companion's) neck and to pull it tight. The poor demented creature did as she was told, and it was not until she became very black in the face and was evidently

suffocating, that her tempter became alarmed and called for help. In doing so she calmly remarked to the nurse: "I have a suspicion that Mrs. So-and-so is trying to kill herself."

One man who was wrongfully placed in the asylum got out. He crossed the Susquehanna River far ahead of his pursuers, who left the hospital in full chase after him. He eluded them, pawned his watch to raise money, rallied his friends around him, and shortly afterward returned to the institution for his clothes—a free man. He had never been insane but was committed to the hospital, through some conspiracy, on the certificate of irresponsible physicians.

During my twenty-eight years' sojourn there, we had four or five fires. One of the most eventful of them happened at night. We all managed to get out. At another fire, Mrs. L——, an inmate and a sister of one of the governors of Pennsylvania, ran away, and for three weeks lived like a tramp in the neighborhood. She was finally caught and brought back. She always insisted that during her absence the birds of the air had fed her, and she could give no other account of herself for the time during which she was missing.

When I was playing a melodeon or doing embroidery, I watched the peculiarities of those around me. One thought that all those in the ward were her dead relatives, and she would address them by name. She believed a fellow patient to be her deceased sweetheart. During lucid intervals she was conscious of her delusion, and laughed at herself as heartily as any.*

Mary ——, a patient from Carlisle, who was admired for her self-possession, smiling face, and quiet demeanor, took up a chair, one morning, and attacked an attendant with it. The latter eluded her, and the chair went against the wall with so much force as to break the plaster. She was tired of life, and thought that if she killed some one she would be hanged for it. One woman, a German, insisted on calling me Madame Lind, and wanted me to sing.

A victim like myself was a Mrs. Z——, who, with her baby, was in the hospital. I knew her well and was certain that she was not insane. Her husband was thriftless, she sued him for support, and he, out of revenge, put her in the asylum. Her friends

* Another had an invariable answer for all the iniquities she heard of—"The fiery furnace is waiting for them;" and, as she said it, the glittering expression of her black eyes was extremely wicked, and gave her auditors a sense of unrest.

soon applied to the court and she was liberated. A patient had to be tied to her bed to prevent her from hanging her feet out of the window. Mrs. B——, an inmate, while every one was at supper, got a match, set fire to herself, and was burned to death. That was her mania.

I do not think the nurses behaved with propriety in removing the remains of dead patients. They made a frolic of the occasion. The poor, half-witted wards of the State remarked upon the disrespect with which the clay of their dead comrades was treated. It was in much the same manner that patients were moved from one ward to another.

My observing powers were concentrated during my stay on such persons as these: One man who had cut his throat; a murderess of her own child; a woman who had been a nurse and who killed an infant under her care; a woman who had severed her child's jugular vein; another who had killed her husband; one who became insane through accidentally killing her child, and any number of patients with suicidal mania.

Some lunatics seem to live in a world of their own. An old lady once astonished and amused us by exclaiming, without any warning or provocation, "Two cats and the bird of paradise are waiting to convey you to your heavenly home, and you are to sit for nine days between the cats and the bird of paradise." Then she stopped, and forgot that she had said anything. It was like an alarm clock suddenly going off, startling every one by its unexpected meddling with what is going on, and ceasing just as quietly and surprisingly. A patient lived in the bath-room, and made friends with the rats (they were numerous), for whom she had a great affection. They would actually do what they were told. Some one else thought she was the wife of President Buchanan, and had the hallucination that her husband frequently ran a locomotive through Washington Avenue, Philadelphia, with a big bonnet in front of it, to remind her of the annoying fact that in her young days she had been a milliner.

There was a Mrs. W——, in one of the back wards, who was injured for life by a patient. One of her delusions was that she had enjoyed herself in previous years riding on the back of a dolphin at Cape May.

I am happy to certify that during the entire period of my incarceration I personally received mild and courteous treatment

from the superior officers of the institution, as well as from the attendants. Possibly it was the conviction on their part that I was not insane which induced the attendants especially to avoid imposing upon me. Altercations with patients are, of course, frequent from the very nature of their maladies, and the position of a nurse or attendant in an insane asylum is a very trying one. It requires great patience and force of character, accompanied by a high order of intelligence. No two cases are alike. I have seen those who were insane every other day, others every other month, or every other year. Some were apparently in full possession of their faculties, though sunk in deep melancholy; while others varied from periods of intense excitement to moments of sadness amounting almost to stupor.

In the fall of 1884 a notice, which the new law required, was posted up in our ward, telling us that if we had any grievances, we could write freely about them to the Committee on Lunacy of the Board of Public Charities. Before I had time to avail myself of that opportunity of getting a hearing, I was taken very ill and was too weak to do anything for some time. When I recovered I found that the patients had torn up and otherwise destroyed the printed law the committee had had posted up; and I did not remember the name of any gentleman upon it. Fortunately Miss Annie Drinker, a convalescent, recollected the name of the medical member of the committee, and wrote to him on September 27th, 1884. We waited for weeks, expecting a reply or a visit, but none came. It appears that the letter miscarried. We did nothing until December 31st, 1884, when we wrote again. That letter reached the committee, and my appeal for liberty was at once looked into. On March 16th, 1885, I sent a letter to Dr. A. J. Ourt, secretary of the committee, and shortly afterwards I was visited by him, Dr. Morton, and Mr. Philip C. Garrett, chairman of the committee. Soon after this the committee fully investigated my case and ordered my immediate release, and I was allowed to go free. As my means were limited (my board had been always paid out of funds left to me), and as I hardly knew what to do, I went to the Convalescents' Retreat, Glen Mills, Pennsylvania, where I now am.

I do not think my story can create in the mind of the reader any but the one impression—that I am a wronged woman, and that there has been something amiss in the system of dealing with those alleged to be insane.

No one, it appears, is now responsible for my incarceration. My counsel informs me that an action will not lie against the State or the hospital authorities, as my commitment was made in due form of law. Apart from this, all those who procured my incarceration have long since died. My release came about solely under the operation of the new lunacy law of Pennsylvania, and the zealous efforts of the gentlemen whose duty it is to carry the law (of May, 1883,) into effect.

Before the law was passed, appeals from inmates of an insane asylum generally fell upon dull and unheeding ears. The only method of release legally provided was an application to a court of law. In the absence of outside friends this was practically impossible.

The law requires the Committee on Lunacy to personally examine the complaint of every asylum inmate, and since the investment of its power and authority, others, who, like myself, seemed doomed to a living death, have been freed from their bonds, and have been once more established in the society from which they were so cruelly removed. At their knock, the door of every asylum, public or private, within the broad confines of this State, must open. At their command the shackles on every lunatic must be loosed, and the blackness of the dark cell has been made to give place to light and air. Handcuffs, straight-jackets, balls and chains, iron rings, and all other such relics of barbarism, are things of the past in Pennsylvania.

To the gentlemen of this committee I am, under a gracious Providence, forever indebted that, after more than a quarter of a century, and at the age of sixty years, I am once more free. Even for this much I thank *Him* in whose unfailing love, in the darkest hours of my trial, I never lost faith.

There are some who, while not responsible at all for my early incarceration, have assisted from time to time in restraining or opposing my efforts to be free. They are, unlike my poor parent, yet among the living. For them I have no unkind word here. Suffering has softened all feeling of hate. Twenty-eight cruel years of torture have swallowed up the natural resentment of a once proud spirit. I leave them to Him, who for some wise reason visited chastisement upon one of His humble creatures, and who now in His own good time has opened to her the gate of mercy.

ADRIANA P. BRINCKLE.